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ABSTRACT

The Oregon competency-based graduation requirements--survival competencies--are motivated not so much by public demands for accountability in the normal sense of improved "efficiency" as by the desire to bring about a greater range of alternative learning settings and experiences. There are two sets of research and development questions related to the instructional dimensions of the graduation requirements. One set deals with technical and process concerns such as setting goals, finding adequate assessment and evaluation devices, and establishing improved procedures for instructional design. The second set of questions centers on potential modifications in interactions of roles and responsibilities among individuals and institutions as schools plan to meet the instructional dimensions of the graduation requirements. (Author/IRT)

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COPING WITH THE INSTRUCTIONAL DIMENSIONS OF COMPETENCY-BASED GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Thomas A. Olson

AERA Presentation

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In introducing the new graduation requirements the Oregon State Department of Education makes it clear that the strategy is a broadly conceived one:

> By 1978, the typical senior year may be dramatically different than it is today. As many as one-third of the seniors could be enrolled in a nearby community college full or part time. Another third could be working in community service activities full or part time. And the other one-third would probably remain in the school-based program . . .
>
> The new standards provide many freedoms for local school districts. It is no longer assumed that every student is a twelve-year learner. Districts may waive attendance requirements and develop eleven-, twelve- or even thirteen-year school programs based on the individual needs of students.

The new requirements' focus on development of competencies necessary for survival in the modern world (with time and instructional settings as variables) is also seen in a broader context:

> The development of survival competencies is only one part of schooling. Local schools are encouraged to offer broad experience in the fine arts, humanities, foreign languages and the usual college preparatory program.

It is thus clear that the Oregon competencies concept is defined as an attempt

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to bring about significant modifications in the design of learning experiences, and is seen as an attempt to liberalize the educational experience.

It is the instructional dimensions of this issue that I should like to address today. The debate over competency based education, whether it centers on teacher education or elementary/secondary education, centers on the issue of control--opponents claim that implementing the competencies concept leads to a rigid factory model of schooling--one which limits options and thus controls. Proponents see the competencies concept as a mechanism for opening up a broader range of alternative learning experiences--experiences which are more relevant to individual student needs. It is clear from its policy and guideline statements that the Oregon Board of Education's competency based graduation requirements are designed to liberate rather than control--to open the range of instructional options rather than restrict them. The requirements are motivated not so much by the public demands for accountability in the normal sense of improved "efficiency" as they are by the desire to bring about a greater range of alternative learning settings and experiences. And therein lies the significant research and development implications and imperatives if the Oregon experiment is to truly bring about instructional improvement and open a greater range of options for learning experiences to Oregon students.

Consider first the tasks the schools must carry out:

1. Setting Goals

   (a) District goals in six life role areas:

   - Learner
   - Individual

- Producer
- Citizen
- Consumer
- Family member

(b) Program goals in 11 program areas which the minimum state standards require to be offered

- Communication skills
- Science
- Citizenship
- Physical education
- Visual and performing arts
- Mathematics
- Social studies
- Health education
- Music education
- Personal finance
- Career education

and in any other areas established by the district

(c) Goal hierarchies for K-12

- Lists of desired learner outcomes for each program offered by elementary and high schools

(d) An identified set of policies and procedures for periodic review, revision and approval of goals

2. Assessment Procedures

(a) Group Assessment

- Assessment of student groups in each of program areas, aggregating data to determine group needs and program design needs

(b) Individual Assessment

- Assessment of each individual student indicating attainment of competencies in all program areas

- Determination of individual needs for diagnosis and prescription

(c) Individual Interest Assessment

- Assessment of each individual student's interests and potential in all program areas
- Determination of individual needs

3. Program Improvement Procedures

- Setting/revising objectives
- Design of alternative learning experiences and alternative learning settings

4. Program Evaluation Procedures

- Schools must show evidence in high school course plans that student achievement of minimum competencies and course goals is used as the basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the instructional program.

5. Student Evaluation Procedures

- Schools must collect and maintain evidence of student attainment of minimum competencies for purposes of certification.

The above system in each school district must be operational by 1978.

I am sure Earl Anderson will discuss in much greater detail the local perspective regarding coping with these requirements. What I would like to address is the research and development perspective and what I perceive to be the critical instructional R and D questions which must be addressed if Oregon is to use the graduation requirements as a successful vehicle for bringing about educational change.

It seems to me that there are two sets of R and D questions related to the instructional dimensions and implications of the graduation requirements.

- One set deals with technical and process concerns

- The second set deals with the interactions of roles and responsibilities of individuals and institutions in the design, implementation and evaluation of instructional procedures

First, the technical and process concerns. One significant question which must be addressed is related to the process of setting goals. A serious attempt at structuring program goal hierarchies from K-12 can indeed bring about significant changes in instructional design and programming. However, current mechanisms and procedures for structuring such hierarchies are far from perfect. Second, there are "turf" prerogatives among various grade levels which will undoubtedly be threatened by such efforts.

In terms of instructional design, the goal and objective setting process could well be used, if approached superficially, to justify current curriculum and instructional practices. The process of setting goals and objectives then becomes an exercise in paper work and turf protecting with little, if any, restructuring of the instructional process. How are we to avoid this? We don't know. Procedures for goal and objective setting which free those involved in that process from the past have not been developed. But if Oregon is to be successful in implementing the graduation requirements and developing in students those competencies necessary for survival in the world of the future, goal and objective setting processes which are <u>future</u> oriented must be developed.

A second major issue is: How will we avoid the "minimum competencies" from becoming identified, for instructional design purposes, as the "maximum competencies."? If this does happen, the notion of using the graduation requirements as a process to open the range of curriculum and instructional alternatives will go unheeded.

Third, there is the question whether it is possible to achieve consensus within a community and among a professional staff on the specific survival competencies. Given the pluralism of our society, I think this is a very real question. It may well be that different groups will have different sets of expectations. If this does indeed reveal itself through the goal and objective setting process, there will be significant implications for an even greater range of alternatives in curriculum design and instructional practices.

A second technical concern is the inadequacy of current assessment and evaluation devices. How and when to use what type of assessment and evaluation device, the problems of efficiency in test administration, problems in data reporting and utilization and the lack of culture fair testing devices are all technical concerns for which we are only beginning to seek solutions.

The graduation requirements suggest strongly that the definition of survival competencies should focus on those skills, understandings and attitudes necessary to survive in a world of change. The utilization of applied performance assessment measures would seem to be an imperative. Applied performance measurement technology is in its infancy.

If assessment and evaluation findings are to be used to bring about instructional change rather than to place blame, there is need for clarity of understanding of the purposes and procedures of group and individual assessment and evaluation techniques. Without such clarity, those techniques could well be the next items of negotiation at the bargaining table.

Finally, if implementation of the competencies concept is to have any meaning, improved procedures for instructional design is an imperative.

As in assessment, this is an area where we fall short in terms of an existing technical knowledge. Given the added Oregon suggestion that schools should seek out alternative learning settings as well as alternative learning experiences the instruction design problem is critical. Adjustments in the sequence, content and nature of learning experiences will require technical support of a magnitude which makes one shudder.

The second set of questions centers on the potential modifications in interactions of roles and responsibilities among individuals and among institutions as schools plan to meet the instructional dimensions of the graduation requirements.

These questions can be summarized as follows:

- To what extent does implementation of a wider range of curriculum and instruction alternatives affect the way in which schools carry out the socialization, custodial, certification and selection functions?
- To what extent and in what way does implementation of the competency based concept influence processes and nature of curriculum planning?
- To what extent and in what way does implementation of competency based education influence teacher-administrator relationships?
- To what extent and in what way does implementation of competency based education influence teacher-student relationships?
- To what extent and in what way does implementation of competency based education influence school-community relationships?

No one group can wrestle with these problems alone. This is the rationale for the consortium representing state, intermediate and local educators as well as those from the research and development community. The technical and policy needs and issues have been identified. What remains to be done is to bring R and D to bear on this real world set of problems which can have major implications not only in Oregon but in the nation.